

Wintersong

Rani Arbo & daisy mayhem

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Rani Arbo: vocals, fiddle, guitar, banjo, cello

Scott Kessel: vocals, drums, percussion, kalimba

Andrew Kinsey: vocals, bass, banjo, ukulele, whistle

Anand Nayak: vocals, electric and acoustic guitar, harmonium

Produced by Anand Nayak with the band

Recorded and mixed by Mark Alan Miller and Anand Nayak at Sonelab, Easthampton MA

Tracks 4 and 5 recorded by Warren Amerman at Rotary Records, West Springfield, MA

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Lyrics & Notes

Let's Make a Baby King

Jesse Winchester (BMG Bumblebee OBO Musique Chanteclair)

The late great Jesse Winchester wrote this colloquial take on the Christmas story. It's a bluesy portrait of ordinary people finding themselves caught up in their God's greater plan. We somehow managed to leave out the best verse by mistake – but include it below. — Andrew

Once upon a Christmas morning
There was a pretty little baby boy
It seems like I remember sadness
Mingling with the joy

'Cause Mary saw the future
And the sadness it would bring
That's why Mary started crying
When she heard the angels sing

*Let's make a Baby King
Let's make Him Lord of all
Let's give Him everything
Let's make a Baby King*

Well, now, you remember little King David
He's this little baby's kin
He was cousin to a man named John
See, I know you all remember Him

'Cause John said, "Let's get ready
Herald angels sing
'Cause this old world sure needs to know
The good news that I bring"

Now, see, we need a revolution
This whole world's upside down
And we need a new direction
We got to turn this whole thing around

We need a Lord to guide us
And teach us wrong from right
And we need a lamb to lead us
Into the land of the light

Yonder Come Day

Bessie Jones and the Sea Island Singers recorded this for Alan Lomax in 1960, describing it as a Christmas or New Year's "shout" after an all-night service. A good song for dawn on the shortest days of the year, and for keeping an eye on hope. — Rani

Yonder come day, I heard him say
Yonder come day, It's a dying day
Yonder come day, It's a burying day
Yonder come day, I was on my knees
Yonder come day, When I heard him say
Yonder come day, That's a New Year's day
Day done broke into my soul
Yonder come day, well, come on, child,
Yonder come day

Julian of Norwich

Sydney Carter (Mechanical Copyright Protection Society, LTD)

Based on the writings of 14th century mystic Julian of Norwich, this simple and beautiful hymn comes from English poet Sydney Carter. I grew up listening to this song on vinyl, comforted by the refrain "all shall be well again, I know". The daffodil, a medieval symbol of Spring, figures heavily. — Andrew

Loud are the bells of Norwich and the people come and go
Here by the tower of Julian I tell them what I know
Ring out bells of Norwich and Let the winter come and go
All shall be well again, I know

Love like the yellow daffodil is coming through the snow
Love like the yellow daffodil is Lord of all I know

Ring out...

Ring for the yellow daffodil, the flower in the snow
Ring for the yellow daffodil and tell them what I know

Ring out...

All shall be well I'm telling you, let the winter come and go
All shall be well again, I know.

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Traditional

This 400-year-old German carol (*Es ist ein Ros entsprungen*) is a favorite from my childhood as a cathedral chorister. More recently, it became a bedtime favorite — quietly plucked on clawhammer banjo in the dark — for our young son. — Rani

Lo, how a rose e'er blooming
From tender stem hath sprung,
Of Jesse's lineage coming,
As men of old have sung.
It came a flow'ret bright
Amid the cold of winter
When half-spent was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
This Rose that I have in mind.
And with Mary we behold it,
The Virgin Mother so sweet and so kind.
To show God's love aright,
She bore to men a Saviour
When half-spent was the night.

O Flower, whose fragrance tender
With sweetness fills the air,
Dispel with glorious splendor
The darkness everywhere;
True man, yet very God,
From Sin and death now save us,
And share our every load.

Children Go Where I Send Thee

Traditional

One of the more classic Christmas songs on the record, Children Go is a lesson song from the African American tradition. As such it's often covered in a somewhat solemn, teacherly way. I've always loved its rhythmic exuberance and thought it would be fun to let the song be more of a wild celebration. — Anand

Children, go where I send thee,
How shall I send thee?
I'm gonna send thee one by one
One for the little bitty baby

Wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, he was
Born, born, born in Bethlehem.

Children, go where I send thee,
How shall I send thee?
I'm gonna send thee two by two
Two for Paul and - Silas
One for the little bitty - baby
Born, born, born in Bethlehem.

Three for the Hebrew children...
Four for the four that stood at the door...
Five for the gospel preachers...
Six for the six that never got fixed...
Seven for the seven that never got to heaven...
Eight for the eight that stood at the gate...
Nine for the nine all dressed so fine...
Ten for the ten commandments...
Eleven for the eleven deriders...
Twelve for the twelve Apostles...

Hot Buttered Rum

Charles "Tommy" Thompson (BMG Bumblebee, OBO Southern Melody Publishing)

Tommy Thompson was the original banjo player for the famed North Carolina-based Red Clay Ramblers. I love how this song invokes the salt and sweet of Christmas. What do you throw at dime store Santas, tinsel angels, dreary decorations, and bitter cold? Human connection. — Rani

When chimney smoke hangs still and low across the stubbled fields of snow
And angry skies reach down and seize the sorry blackened bones of trees
In the dead of winter when the silent snowbirds come
You're my sweet maple sugar, honey, hot buttered rum

When dreary Christmas decorations line the streets and filling stations
And dime store Santas can't disguise their empty hands and empty eyes
In the dead of winter when the tinsel angels come
You're my sweet maple sugar, honey, hot buttered rum

When gloves and boots and woolen parkas bring cold comfort to the heart
And bitter memories freeze the tongue and songs of love are left unsung
In the dead of winter when the cold feelings come
You're my sweet maple sugar, honey, hot buttered rum

2,000 Miles

Chrissie Hynde (EMI April Music, Inc.)

Chrissy Hynde wrote this Pretenders' single for a bandmate who had passed away. In its simple way, it captures the essence of one of the deeper aspects of the winter holidays. Amid the other-worldly beauty of winter, as the year draws to a close and we hover between past and future, our losses can take on a certain clarity. But the children are singing, and around we go. — Anand

He's gone two thousand miles
It's very far
The snow is falling down
it's colder day by day
I miss you
The children are singing
He'll be back at Christmastime

In these frozen and silent nights
Sometimes in a dream you appear
Outside under a purple sky
Diamonds in the snow sparkle
Our hearts were singing
It felt like Christmastime

Two thousand miles
Is very far through the snow
I'll think of you
Wherever you go

He's gone two thousand miles
It's very far
The snow is falling down
It's colder day by day
I miss you

I can hear people singing
It must be Christmastime
I hear people singing
It must be Christmastime

Maybe This Christmas

Ron Sexsmith (Sony/ATV Songs LLC OBO Samp-UK LTD)

From the pen of Canadian Ron Sexsmith, a gorgeous prayer for meaning and redemption from a holiday that doesn't always live up to the hype. Recommended listening for the car ride to your relative's house. — Andrew

Maybe this Christmas will mean something more
Maybe this year love will appear
Deeper than ever before

And maybe forgiveness will ask us to call
Someone we love, someone we've lost
For reasons we can't quite recall, oh

Maybe this Christmas
Maybe there'll be an open door
Maybe the star that shined before
Will shine once more, oh

And maybe this Christmas will find us at last
In Heavenly peace,
Grateful at least
For the love we've been shown in the past, oh
Maybe this Christmas, maybe this Christmas

Ring Out, Wild Bells

Words: Alfred, Lord Tennyson
Music: Rani Arbo (Jinn Mill Music)

When we decided to make this album, I went looking for poems, and this one struck me hard. Tennyson published it in 1850 after the death of his sister's fiancée at the age of 22; it is part of a longer elegy, *In Memoriam*. It seems to balance an unshakeable grief with a need to articulate hope. In my reading — and in this musical setting — the grief is winning, even while it's clearly understood that hope is the only way forward. Tennyson's last verse I did not sing; it was more powerful to me to end with a thousand years of peace. — Rani

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bells, and let him die.

Ring out the old, ring in the new,

Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true.

Ring out the grief that saps the mind,
For those that here we see no more,
Ring out the feud of rich and poor,
Ring in redress to all mankind.

Ring out the want, the care, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times;
Ring out, ring out thy mournful rhymes,
But ring the fuller minstrel in.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease,
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

(Tennyson's final verse, not sung):

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

Bonne Année

Canray Fontenot and Michael Doucet (Flat Town Music Co., ADO Swallow Publications, Inc.)

I first heard Michael Doucet's Cajun fiddling on stage with the "American Folk Violin" tour in 1988, a show that pretty much decided my musical future. Of this collaboration with the legendary Creole fiddler Canray Fontenot, Michael writes: "One of Canray Fontenot's greatest creative qualities was the fact that he remembered many unaccompanied ballads or story songs and sang them in his own deeply resonating voice. I loved singing Bonne Année with him and I would accompany him with my fiddle. He liked my arrangement and encouraged me to record my version. Every time I sing it my heart is filled with his memory and our precious time spent together." The words translate to: "Hello, Happy New Year, Madame (and Monseieur)! What is your wish?" Many thanks to Yvette Landry for help with the Cajun French pronunciation, which we nevertheless certainly botched.

Bonjour, bonne année
Quelle est souhaite à tous
Hereuse, hereuse année
Quelle est souhaite à tous

Bonjour, bonne année
Bonne année, Madame
Hereuse, hereuse
Quelle est souhaite à tous?

Bonjour bonne
Bonne année, Monseieur
Hereuse, hereuse année
Quelle est souhaite à tous?

Bonjour bonne année, Madame
Bonjour, bonne année, bonne année, Monseieur
Et bonjour bonne année, Madame
Bonjour, bonne année, bonne année, Monseieur

Hereuse, hereuse année
Quelle est souhaite à tous?
Hereuse, hereuse année
Quelle est souhaite à tous

(repeat verse)

Bonjour bonne année
Quelle est souhaite à tous?
Hereuse, hereuse année
Quelle est souhaite à tous?

Hereuse, hereuse année
Quelle est souhaite à tous
Hereuse, hereuse année
Quelle est souhaite à tous?

Christmas Bells

Words: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
Music: Anand Nayak (Dizzydog Music)

When Rani sent it to me, I wasn't acquainted with either Longfellow's anti-war lament (written after the loss of his son and wife) or its famous musical settings, many of which favor the peaceful, Christmas-y verses and downplay the anti-war part. Perhaps having a blank slate helped the music of it to leap off the page as I read it. It tolls the eternal holiday message of "peace on earth, goodwill to men" even as peace is mocked by hate and obliterated by war. Hopefully, the bell keeps ringing. — Anand

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,

The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men.”

A Christmas Carol

Words: G.K. Chesterton

Music: Rani Arbo (Jinn Mill Music)

I love how lean these verses are, and how alive. — Rani

The Christ-child lay on Mary's lap
His hair was like a light.
(O weary, weary were the world,
But here is all alright.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's breast
His hair was like a star.
(O stern and cunning are the kings,
But here the true hearts are.)

The Christ-child lay on Mary's heart,
His hair was like a fire.
(O weary, weary is the world,
But here the world's desire.)

The Christ-child stood on Mary's knee,
His hair was like a crown,
And all the flowers looked up at Him,
And all the stars looked down.

Singing in the Land

Traditional

Thanks for this song are due to Elizabeth Mitchell, who recorded it beautifully on her album, *The Sounding Joy*. I must add: I'm grateful for the 17 years of singing together, and with our audiences, that add up to moments like these. — Rani

Singin' (walking, dancing, praying) in the land, singing in the land
Singing in the land, I'm a long way from home
Singing in the land, singing in the land
Baby of Bethlehem

Oh Mother (Father, Sister, Brother) don't you want to go to heaven?

Oh, Mother don't you want to go to heaven
Oh, Mother don't you want to go to heaven
Baby of Bethlehem